



# News Release

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## **Oyster growers agree to seek new approach to control shrimp**

**OLYMPIA** – Oyster growers in Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor today will sign an agreement with the state that will ensure burrowing shrimp are controlled in the most environmentally and economically sound manner possible.

The growers are signing a memorandum of agreement with the state departments of Ecology, Agriculture, and Fish and Wildlife. Under the agreement, the growers will change the way they control burrowing shrimp, which ruin prime oyster-growing mudflats by burrowing into the sand, allowing oysters to sink or be buried, and thus inhibiting or killing the crop.

The growers will use an “integrated pest management” (IPM) process to establish pest-control methods that are both environmentally and economically sound. An IPM plan uses monitoring and evaluation to determine pest-prevention techniques and what levels of the pest that can be tolerated. Today’s agreement calls for investigating alternatives that might include identifying ways to increase shrimp predators or harden the mudflats. It also calls for investigating methods to more-precisely deliver pesticides to shrimp burrows to reduce the amount of chemicals applied.

Chemicals may still be a vital control measure, depending on the outcome of the research and evaluation required in the agreement.

“There is still a long way to go to lessen our reliance on chemicals as the sole mechanism to keep shrimp out of the oyster beds. This agreement is a very good sign that the industry may soon be headed in this direction,” said Kelly Susewind, a water-quality manager for Ecology.

“This is a major step. We are committing to a process,” said Brian Sheldon, president of the Willapa/Grays Harbor Oyster Growers Association. “The agreement is important because it provides some degree of regulatory stability for the industry and it gives regulators and the general public assurances that the industry is clearly dedicated to regulatory compliance and environmental stewardship.”

Oyster growers have used the pesticide carbaryl since the early 1960s to control burrowing ghost and mud shrimp in Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor. Besides destroying oyster habitat, burrowing shrimp infestations crowd out other aquatic life and decrease natural biodiversity of the estuary.

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Prior to the early 1960s, nature controlled the burrowing shrimp, according to Sheldon. Today's oyster growers are interested to find out how and why those natural controls worked, he said.

Even though carbaryl is used sparingly, is carefully applied under strict state permits, and its environmental effects are controlled, it is toxic to juvenile salmon, Dungeness crab and other aquatic life. For this reason, the preferred alternative of a 1992 state environmental impact study (EIS) was that an IPM plan be developed to manage burrowing shrimp. To date, that plan has not been completed, and this agreement will ensure the EIS recommendations are implemented.

Today's agreement sets deadlines for the oyster growers to gather information so the plan can be developed, and requires completion by March 29, 2002.

To help develop the plan, the Department of Fish & Wildlife will continue to participate in IPM-related research, provide expertise to the growers, and may conduct experiments on state oyster reserves.

The Department of Ecology will continue to oversee the current permitting program. The agency will also participate in IPM-related research, evaluation and development, and finally approve, condition or disapprove the plan.

The Department of Agriculture will continue to monitor carbaryl applications.

Others signing the agreement include the Washington State Commission on Pesticide Registration, the Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers Association and the Pacific Shellfish Institute.

"While the agreement does not lessen reliance on the pesticide, that may be an eventual outcome after exploring the feasibility of other control options," Ecology's Susewind added.

The area covered in the agreement includes approximately 9,000 acres in Willapa Bay and 900 acres in Grays Harbor. Of that total acreage, a maximum of 600 acres per year in Willapa Bay and 200 acres per year in Grays Harbor are treated with carbaryl annually. There are nearly 80,000 acres of tidelands in the two harbors.

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(**Note to news editors:** Reporters who want to cover the signing ceremony can meet state officials at 1 p.m. at the Blue Heron Restaurant in Bay Center. The group will walk to a nearby oyster farm for the signing event.)

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